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# PERSONAL HISTORY OF THE SECOND EMPIRE.

## IX.—INTRIGUE AND CORRUPTION.

BY ALBERT D. VANDAM, AUTHOR OF "AN ENGLISHMAN IN PARIS," "MY PARIS NOTE-BOOK," ETC., ETC.

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IF the *chronique scandaleuse* of the Second Empire were not so inextricably mixed up with its political history, I would fain have kept my pen clean of the former altogether. When one stands confronted with a *régime* which, during its eighteen years' existence waged four formidable wars, not one of which on careful examination seems to have been necessitated by the nation's welfare, the natural impulse is to look for the causes of such wars below the surface.

And a glance below the surface reveals, behind that glittering Court which every one knows, with its ambassadors, chamberlains, generals, ministers, and ladies of honor, a seething mass of intrigue and corruption to find the like of which we must revert to the reigns of Charles II. in England and of Louis XV. in France. True, there is no titular mistress of the Emperor, either in the shape of a Lady Castlemain, a Duchess of Portsmouth or a Marquise de Pompadour, but it is doubtful whether erstwhile Mrs. Palmer, Louise de Kéroualles and Madame d'Étiolles were more fatal to the Stuart and the Bourbon than the women who surrounded the nephew of the great Bonaparte. Not one, save Princesse Clotilde inspired the public with that respect which is the first and foremost condition of the prestige of a dynasty whether that dynasty be hereditary, founded by the sword or intrigue as were the dynasties of Louis Philippe and Louis Napoleon. Of one thing we may be sure, in spite of the cheers that greeted the Empress in public; the French people spoke of the ultra-fashionable throng that surrounded her as the English of the latter

end of the seventeenth century spoke of the court beauties of Charles II., as the French of the middle of the eighteenth century spoke of the *grandes dames* of Louis XV.'s Court. And the gossip, an attractive dish of truth and fiction, especially where the Empress herself was concerned, spread over the borders of the land ; and, as in the days of Charles II. and Louis XV., found its way to the Courts of Europe. Smart attachés, if not their chiefs themselves, sent amusing accounts of the *faits et gestes* of the women and men that foregathered at Compiègne, Fontainebleau, and the Tuileries ; accounts which vitiated beforehand all the serious documents emanating from the Quai d'Orsay ; the recipients of the latter refusing to take *au sérieux* the political aspirations of a sovereign who tolerated around him a society to the full as profligate and corrupt as that which had danced and disported itself in the *salons* and gardens of Versailles under the *ancien régime*.

I have already indicated, at the beginning of the fifth part of these papers, the source of the following notes. There is no indication as to their exact date, nor were they all written at the same time, but several events to which they refer incidentally show them to belong to the first half of the sixties.

"I have just returned from Compiègne, where I had not been for three years, and was irresistibly reminded of a conversation with Vély Pasha at a dinner party at the Tuileries shortly after the Emperor's marriage. The haunted look we noticed then on the faces of the courtiers and even on those of the sovereigns has altogether disappeared. *On s'amuse ferme*,\* and I am not at all certain whether they are not enjoying themselves a little too much, and in a fashion not altogether calculated to enhance the prestige of the dynasty with the other courts of Europe. I must confess that my previsions, or let me say my expectations, in that respect have been woefully disappointed, although, at the outset, they bade fair to be realized. I did not for a moment imagine that the Tuileries would become dowdy, dull, and respectable the greater part of the year and ridiculously *bourgeois* on so-called grand occasions, as it was in the days of Louis Philippe ; but I fancied that the golden mean would be observed ; I fancied that the society there would become a cross

\* A paraphrase of a French commercial term "*acheter ferme*," that is, buying outright without any restrictions.

between that of Versailles in the most brilliant days of Louis XIV. and that of the First Empire at its most prosperous period ; in other words, I fancied that part of the Faubourg St. Germain would gradually rally to the Second Empire, and neutralize by its grand air and unimpeachable manners the too obviously *soldatesque sans-façon*, from which even the best of Napoleon III.'s marshals and generals—with the exception of Macmahon—are not wholly free, the somewhat too conquering attitude of the male civilian element toward the women, and the rather challenging tactics of the latter in response. This blending of two sections of society no doubt commended itself to the Emperor, especially when, after his accession to the throne, he cast a look around him and found himself deserted by the *bonne compagnie*, and notably by the female part of it, that had graced the Salon of the Elysée during the presidency. With this end in view he would have willingly made many sacrifices to concentrate the old *noblesse*, and even gone a step further than his uncle under similar circumstances. Napoleon III. would have put the old *noblesse* into places short of the very highest, by which I mean that he would have entrusted the men with diplomatic missions, as he eventually did with few that came to him, although at that time he would not have conferred a ministry on a known partisan of Legitimacy. 'Those people understand nothing of politics, and I did not want them for that. I only required them for decorative purposes, for they are eminently fit to wear gold lace. I would have willingly gilded them on all their edges,' he said afterward.

"And some of them consented to be gilt in that fashion, but, unlike their predecessors under the First Empire, they consider that the obligation is entirely on the side of the dispenser of the favors, and the nephew has not the strength of character of the uncle to tell them to leave the Court, if not France, unless their presence confers credit and not discredit on the dynasty. In fact, I doubt whether any except the most drastic measures in that respect would be of the least avail now ; the thing has gone on too long, and instead of a Versailles of Louis XIV., blended with some of the virtues of the military and civil *parvenus* of the Napoleonic era, we have a glittering but utterly dissolute and ethically worthless society, which is simply a startling reproduction of the Pompadour era, *plus* the swagger

and barrack-language of the *beau sabreur* at his worst, when, in spite of that swagger and his late successes in the field I suspect him to be lacking in the sterling soldierly qualities and unquestionable warlike talents of his *dévaciers*. The Court, as I saw it at Compiègne a day or two ago, presents the most heterogeneous gathering of humanity it has ever been my lot to behold away from the gaming rooms at Baden-Baden, with which it has also one trait in common besides its outward elegance, namely, its absolute egoism, the unscrupulous hostility of each of its members towards his neighbor, like himself in pursuit of a favor, a possibly profitable transaction, or an intrigue. Like the gathering at Baden-Baden, it is, as I have said, composed of utterly dissimilar elements, of a semi-ruined old *noblesse* side by side with a prosperous Jewish financial fraternity; of a *bourgeoisie* with all the greed of the French *bourgeoisie* of olden as well as modern times thick upon it, and sorely perplexed at its inability to keep its hoard; of Harpagons emulating with wry faces the lavishness of the Gramont-Caderousses and the Demidoffs; of rapacious would-be Massenass and spendthrift would-be Lasalles, but without the military genius that distinguished the Duc de Rivoli and the hero of Prentzlau.

“Do what one will, it is impossible to close one’s eyes to these facts forced upon one’s notice the moment one sets foot within the court circle, and the mental cataract which evidently prevents the Emperor from seeing them will, I am afraid, have to be removed one day, remote or near, with danger to himself and to his dynasty. The gambling stories alone are sufficient to make one’s hair stand on end, and the culprits, whether they figure as hawks or pigeons, invariably belong to the army. Those convicted of cheating, albeit not publicly—not merely suspected—are not only allowed to retain their commissions, but are received at court as if nothing had happened. The Comte ——— was caught red-handed at Chantilly a twelvemonth or so before the revolution that cost Louis Philippe his throne. He was compelled to lie low during the remainder of the Citizen Monarchy, and during the whole of the Second Republic, but at present he holds his head as high as ever. A lieutenant in the Guards, a victim that one, lost 20,000 francs at one sitting. He had not a red cent towards the money, but he did not worry himself in the least, and in the morning

he simply applied to the Emperor. The move was a masterly one, apart from the young fellow's knowledge that the Emperor never refused an appeal for money as long as he had any to give. He wound up his request by saying that there were only three courses open to him, viz., the appeal he ventured on, dishonor, or suicide. Of course under the circumstances the Emperor could not very well refuse if he had felt inclined to do so, which, truth to tell, he did not. He could not very well have had it said of him that he had driven a promising young officer to suicide for the sake of a few thousand francs. I know well enough, though, what would have happened if a similar request had been preferred to Wilhelm of Prussia or Francis-Joseph of Austria who, I have not the least doubt, are as tenacious of the honor of their officers as is the Emperor of the French. The honor of the officer would have remained safe, but he would have had to pay for it with the loss of his commission.\*

"The Emperor scarcely reprimanded the young fellow. Opening a packet of money, he handed him the money. 'The life of one of my soldiers is worth more than the sum of which you stand in need,' he said, with that peculiar smile which constitutes his greatest charm. 'But I am not at all rich and I

\* The laws on gambling in the army were and are very strict both in Austria and Germany proper. I do not know enough of Austria to be able to say what would have happened there under similar circumstances, but I fancy the author of the note is correct in his surmise that King Wilhelm would not have been quite as lenient as was Napoleon III. At any rate I knew two Prussian officers who lost their commissions for having gambled away more than they could pay. In the one case the gambling debt was paid; the gambler was, however, cashiered. During my stay in Paris I used to meet him frequently; he had become a correspondent for several German papers. In the other case the debt was not paid; the dishonored gambler was obliged to leave the country. He took service in the French foreign legion. The last time I saw him, about three years ago, he was doing well as a military coach in London, for by that time he was close upon sixty. The late Emperor Wilhelm, though, did not always punish so severely, especially when the offender happened to be the gainer instead of the loser. For sometime after the revolution of 1849 the Duchy of Baden was occupied by the Prussian troops that had helped to quell the insurrection. The officers quartered at Rastadt had been especially cautioned against playing at Baden-Baden. One summer evening King then Prince) Wilhelm strolled into the gaming rooms and noticed an officer in mufti at play. The officer was winning, not much, but a good deal for a Prussian lieutenant, for there were four *Friedrichs d'or* on the red. He had begun with one and the color had turned up twice. Just as he was about to pick up the money he caught sight of the Prince watching him. Terror-stricken, he stood as if rooted at the spot. The red turned up a third, then a fourth time, still the officer did not move. At last the maximum is reached, and the croupier asks—"Combien a la masse?" No answer. "*Combien a la masse?*" shouts the croupier once more. Thereupon the Prince walks round to the officer's side, taps him on the shoulder and says gently—"Take up your money and go lest one of your chiefs should catch you here." As a matter of course, the lieutenant did not want telling twice. A couple of days later there happened to be a review at Rastadt. Prince Wilhelm caught sight of the lieutenant and sent for him. "Lieutenant \* \* \*" he said, "after you went away, the red turned out four times more. I prevented you from winning four times the maximum which you would have been sensible enough to stake. You can draw upon me for that amount. But take my advice; do not gamble again. M. Benazet is not the enemy to attack twice under similar conditions."

might not be able at all times to redeem it at such a price. Go and sin no more.'

"Of Napoleon III.'s goodness of heart there cannot be the smallest doubt, but I am afraid it is being taken advantage of on all sides ; and, what is worse, he knows it, and half of his sadness is due to his knowledge. The sentence, 'The life of one of my soldiers is worth more than the sum of which you stand in need,' is very pretty, but utterly untrue. I doubt whether Napoleon III. uttered it for effect. I do not think so. But take his army from whatever point of view you will—from the military, the moral, or the social—there are not many officers in it the redemption of whose life is worth 20,000 francs.

"This does not mean that there are no competent and honorable men in that army to the efficiency of which France will eventually have to trust for her political supremacy in Europe ; but those men are systematically snubbed, discouraged, and thrust into the shade by the military Court party, which is distinctly a creation of the Empress, to whom the barrack-room manners of a Pélissier, for instance, are naturally distasteful. She seems to be entirely ignorant of the fact that between the fall of the First Empire and the rise of the Second there has sprung up a race of soldiers as far removed from the very wonderful but nevertheless very ignorant and rough-hewn generals of the great Napoleon as the latter were from the highly-educated and highly-polished but nevertheless the reverse of wonderful generals of the *ancien régime*, who, like the Duc de Saint-Simon, grumbled and threw up their commissions because at the age of twenty-seven they had got no farther than their colonelcy, which, like that of the immortal author of the *Memoirs*, their parents had bought for them when they were beardless lads. That military court *coterie* dare not ignore the claims of a Pélissier, but it pooh-poohs the claims of a Stoffel, a Trochu, and a score of others who are their superiors in every way, except in the art of bowing and scraping, leading the cotillion, and coining smart epigrams. These men, the Stoffels and Trochus, are of opinion that if promotion cannot always be gained on the battlefield face to face with the enemy, it should at any rate not be sought for in the drawing-room, but be won in the barracks schoolroom, the drill-ground, and the camp. They are gentlemen in the best acceptance of the term, some-

what Puritanical as far as their profession is concerned, and consequently as averse to the introduction of the barrack-room into the boudoir—which is the Pélissier way—as they are to the introduction of the boudoir element and influence into the army—which is the way of the court *coterie*. The Stoffels and Trochus are the lives which are worth more than 20,000 francs apiece, or would be if their owners did not allow their tempers to be soured by the others, and did not keep sulking in their tents.

“But if the court *coterie* objects to barrack-yard manners à la Pélissier in the drawing-room, they do not appear to entertain a similar objection to introducing *boudoir* influence into the army. Of course the *coterie* would fain preserve a monopoly in that respect, but the courtesan claims in this, as in all other things, equality with the aristocratic *intrigante*. Here is a story to that effect which was running the round of Paris only the other day, and a story running the round of Paris soon spreads to the provinces and across the frontier provided it be scandalous enough.

“Anna Deslions, whose real name is Deschiens and who a few years ago was taken under the wing of the famous Esther Guimont, lost her father. I suppose he was neither worse nor better than a great many French fathers of the lower classes; he was perfectly aware of his daughter's doings, which knowledge did not prevent him from living very comfortably on the allowance she made him. Anna, it appears, was never tired of extolling his virtues, and insisted on his having a magnificent funeral, for the funds of which she applied to her ‘protector-in-chief’ who happens to be a general of brigade and a curmudgeon of the first water. He simply applied to the Military Governor of Paris for a battalion and the band of the regiment quartered in the Faubourg Poissonnière for the obsequies of a veteran of the First Empire, which request was granted most graciously. The funeral service was held at St. Laurent, and the female friends of the bereaved daughter mustered in great force. The papers gave a minute account of the affair, but somehow the story of the deception leaked out. The general was reprimanded, but the Emperor, always anxious to avoid scandals, ordered the thing to be hushed up. He, however, stopped the general from inviting private tenders for the celebration of the yearly mass for the repose of old Deschien's soul, which that delectable warrior wanted to do in imitation of his fellow-soldier, General Fabvier, who died in '55.”



Thus far the note, the absolute accuracy of which I could prove by others in my possession and from entirely different sources. A careful study of these leads me to one conclusion, which I will endeavor to state as briefly as possible. Of all those who "had the ear" of Napoleon III., there were not more than four—certainly not more than a half-dozen counsellors—who were loyally devoted to him and to his dynasty. The others merely looked upon the dynasty as a stepping-stone to the acquisition of enormous wealth, as an instrument for the gratification of their vanity, and the realization of ambitious schemes more guilty still. If the latter were unfolded here in their naked truth, the revelation would raise a storm of invective such as a man endowed with far greater courage than mine might well wish to avoid. This much I will say, come what may: with the exception of Persigny, Fleury, Rouher, Mocquard, Princesse Mathilde, Princesse Anna Murat (Duchesse de Mouchy), and, to a certain extent, Walewski, every man and woman at the Tuileries worked for his or her own hand, and by their matchless selfishness, utter absence of scruple, and overweening conceit, incurred the withering contempt and scathing, but nevertheless deserved, criticism of a section of society, the existence of which is tacitly ignored in every well-ordered community, in spite of its presence being as plain as the sun on a bright summer's day.

The male counterpart of that section, consisting of *chevaliers d'industrie*, company promoters of a kind, shady financiers, and the like, were more practical. They neither indulged in profitless sneers and recriminations against the *manieurs d'argent* at court, nor instituted comparisons between the latter and themselves. They knew that such comparisons would have been simply ridiculous. From the time that Mouvillon de Glimes had started his "limited company" entitled Société Anonyme de Produits Chimiques, and without as much as showing a printed share or prospectus, had swooped in a million and a half of francs, with which he decamped across the Pyrenées, from that time the swindlers not affiliated to the court knew the futility of competing with those who were. The former might be just as clever as the others—in many instances they were as clever and cleverer—but the law, when it overtook them, had to show itself doubly severe to dispel the suspicion attached to it of having been utterly apathetic on former occasions. No one was ever deceived

by this except Napoleon III. himself, who fondly imagined that the nation could be hoodwinked by the system of making the less guilty pay for the more guilty, for it finally became a system. And thus it came to pass that the sovereign, who during the whole of his reign had been constantly engaged in shielding the most unscrupulous, and at the same time most cowardly, freebooter of his time, lent himself to the persecution—for prosecution is too mild a term—of a comparatively innocent man. I am alluding to Mirès, who was to Morny as John Law to the fraudulent son of a banker. The latter goes on using his father's name and influence to make dupes, knowing full well that when the crash comes the father will step in and hush the matter up at the risk of being reduced to beggary himself.

That the Emperor had to do this frequently the papers found at the Tuileries after the fall of the Empire leave not the smallest doubt; that he finally got tired of this incessant and enormous strain on his purse there is equally no doubt. One instance among many will suffice. One morning there came—by appointment, of course—to the Emperor's private room an individual, a mere glance at whom revealed the prosperous, irrepressible loud-voiced and loud-mannered *brasseur d'affaires*.\* His fingers and shirt front blazing with diamonds, formidable gold chain across his chest, the ample cut of his brand new clothes, everything, in short, proclaimed the prosperity to be of recent standing. He came to submit to His Majesty the project of some new works to be constructed in the heart of the capital. The Emperor, though rarely surprised at anything, was surprised this time, and could not help showing his surprise. The scheme, though a vast one, had nothing to recommend itself or to distinguish it from a hundred others; it was on the face of it a gigantic building speculation, and nothing more. The Emperor as good as said so, and added that in any case it was a matter for his Minister of Public Works and not for himself to decide, at which remark the applicant opened his eyes very wide. "That would be true, sire, under ordinary circumstances," he began somewhat timidly; "but in this instance your Majesty has been informed of the whole affair beforehand." This time it is the Emperor who opens his eyes very wide. "I have been informed of nothing, mon-

\* Literally "brewer of business": the French equivalent for the still more modern and more euphemistic English term "promoter."

sieur," he says. "I beg your Majesty's pardon," stammered the applicant, "but——" "I beg your pardon, monsieur," replied the Emperor, "but——" "M. de —— has told your Majesty nothing?" "M. de —— has told me nothing."

Thereupon the applicant, unable to contain himself any longer, burst out, "The cheat, the cheat! And I who gave him a hundred thousand francs but two days ago, because he told me that your Majesty had promised him to support my project! The Emperor calmly dismissed his visitor, but a few hours later he enacted a stormy scene with the official in question as a spectator. The latter remained perfectly unmoved and simply smiled. "For two twos he would have applauded as one applauds a mummer at whom one laughs inwardly for overdoing the thing," said the Emperor bitterly, when he told the affair to Fleury. "Instead of which, when I left off abusing him for sheer want of breath, he quietly remarked: 'Your Majesty is really too kind to worry yourself about such an idiot as that.'"

This is the synopsis of one of the innumerable one-act pieces that preceded the big tragedy entitled "The Campaign in Mexico," the inception of which must have been due to some such scene as the one I described just now. Jecker, the Swiss money-monger, who had lent Miramon 7,425,000 francs—or at any rate nearly half that sum in bare money—was a somewhat more important personage than the Frenchman whom the Emperor had been obliged to dismiss so unceremoniously; especially after he, Jecker, had done France the honor to become naturalized, and had begun to press his claim of 75,000,000 francs against Mexico. Morny himself, though daring enough, would not have dared to wash his hands of him, and instead of the play ending with the exit of Jecker from the private room of Napoleon III., the play had only reached the end of its prologue. I do not state this to be an absolute fact; I merely surmise, for everything connected with the initial business of the War in Mexico is so enwrapped in mystery that one must not speak with certainty. An attempt to let in light on that subject as well as on the subsequent events consequently becomes impossible at the end of a chapter, but I will endeavor to do so in the next.

ALBERT D. VANDAM.

(To be Continued.)